# 2004 Annual Report NC Million Acre Initiative

Presented to the Governor of North Carolina and the Environmental Review Commission of the North Carolina General Assembly

September 1, 2004

By the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources Office of Conservation and Community Affairs

#### **The Latest Numbers**

At the end of the fifth full year of the North Carolina Million Acre Initiative (January 1, 1999 - December 31, 2003), private and public land protection partners across the state have permanently protected an additional **280,342** "Million Acre" acres. These partners reported adding **52,103** of those acres during the 2003 calendar year. This past year's activities represent an increase in the rate of land protection in North Carolina from the previous year. New in 2003 was the Ecosystem Enhancement Program, which closed on 4,274 acres of permanently protected land, including preservation mitigation. Many of those acres show up under other agencies' or land trusts' totals, including high-profile projects such as Wildlife Resource Commission's Buffalo Cove Game Land, and the Division of Parks and Recreation's acquisitions for Haw River and Eno River State Parks.

The table at the end of this report describes in detail the number of acres protected by sector (state government, local government, etc), by program, and by time period. Footnotes at the bottom of the page note special circumstances in some of the calculations. The end result is a conservative presentation of the totals. It is likely that the numbers presented here could be adjusted upward between 10,000 to 30,000 acres. To avoid frustration and embarrassment in the future, only official reports of new acquisitions (from surveys, interviews, and questionnaires) make it into the final total. Estimations for non-respondents are not included.

It should be noted that, while our rate of land protection is encouraging, we have not yet reached an annual rate that will allow us to meet the goal of permanently protecting an additional million acres by December 31, 2009 (G.S. 113A-240 and 241). The primary barrier is the availability of public and private funding for new protection projects. If we intend to meet the Million Acre Goal by the end of 2009, more money for land protection must be found.

### The Program

In addition to working to increase the rate at which we are protecting land in North Carolina, the Million Acre Initiative continues to work towards making information about land protection

tools and techniques more broadly available, and to encourage conservation planning. As noted in the 2003 report, because there are so many shared goals, the Million Acre Initiative has joined the One North Carolina Naturally effort. The Million Acre Initiative, in conjunction with One North Carolina Naturally and other partners, continues to slowly but steadily increase awareness among North Carolinians about the desperate condition of our land resources.

One goal for land conservation has been the completion of regional open space plans for every part of the state. One North Carolina Naturally is currently leading this effort, providing local interested parties a forum to meet and jointly inventory existing open space resources, and highlight regional and state priorities. These meetings make it possible to see how individual greenspaces and working landscapes across North Carolina fit together into a network of essential green infrastructure. Currently, there are 14 local and regional open space planning efforts encompassing 92 counties across North Carolina. The regional planning efforts have highlighted that technical assistance to local governments, non-profits, and community groups is still needed. This includes education and awareness building for local elected officials and the general population. These local and regional efforts will provide invaluable information to be used in the development of the One North Carolina Naturally statewide conservation plan. Consistent data from each of these Regional Plans is being incorporated into the One North Carolina Naturally decision support tool, and the data will be continually updated to remain current. As tens of thousands of acres a year are permanently altered from their existing natural condition for new development, increased awareness about the importance of setting aside our critical and unique lands is essential, and providing information and conservation tools is part of our job.

## **Looking Ahead**

While the 52,000 acres permanently protected in 2003 was notably less than the 80,000 acres predicted, (in part because state funding to transfer land from The Nature Conservancy to the state was not available), calendar year 2004 looks to be a good year for new land protection projects. The partners included in the attached summary table will no doubt continue their efforts, and a "Lands for Tomorrow" coalition is collaborating with One North Carolina

Naturally program to look for ways to expand our land conservtion efforts. The General Assembly provided authorization for the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund to finance land acquisition projects that are critical for the expansion of our state park system and our gamelands, as well as for compatible use around our military bases. The legislation authorizes the state to issue \$32 million in bonds for fiscal year 2005 and \$13 million for FY 2006, and gives DENR the flexibility to take advantage of time-sensitive opportunities, such as the expansion of Lake James State Park. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is looking to increase the number of permanent easements (As of August 31, 2004, there were 49 permanent easements enrolling 2,788 acres, and 384 thirty-year easements enrolling 9,044 acres). Also, the Ecosystem Enhancement Program should come on board fully, and close on a number of pending projects.

Gaps in North Carolina's conservation funding remain a challenge. For example, Clean Water Management Trust Fund has not been fully funded. Also, there is no dedicated source of funding for conservation of North Carolina's farms and forest lands. It will be difficult to meet the million acres goal without a working lands component that helps to maintain local production of agriculture and forest products.

The upcoming year offers us an opportunity to compile results from regional open-space planning forums, and work to implement recommendations from local public input. As noted above, by teaming with the One North Carolina Naturally effort to foster the completion of regional open space plans for every part of the state, it will be possible to see how individual greenspaces and working landscapes across North Carolina fit together into a network of green infrastructure. Understanding the interrelationships among those areas will help us target our protection efforts so that we maximize the cost effectiveness and the natural protection value of our investment, and improve North Carolina's quality of life.

#### **Acres Under Permanent Protection**

(note: a blank cell means no data were collected. 0 means no land was protected)

							"Million
State Agency	category	Acres Protected 1/99 - 12/00	Acres Protected 1/01 - 12/01	Acres Protected 1/02 - 12/02	Sub-Total through 2002	Acres Protected 1/03 - 12/03	Acre" Total
DENR - FOREST RESOURCES	state forest	1,746	2,535	793	5,074	642	5,716
DENR - SOIL AND WATER	conservation reserve	240	F26	526	1 111	459	1 970
DENR - SOIL AND WATER	enhancement program	349		536 57	1,411 943	459 84	1,870 1,027
WILDLIFE RESOURCES	hog farm buyout game lands	28,010				11,394	61,273
DENR - Ecosystem Enhancement	game lands	20,010	15,485	0,304	49,879	11,554	01,273
Program(*)	wetlands & riparian mitigation	139	75	379	593	935	1,528
DENR - PARKS AND REC.	state park	13,897	3,729	2,270	19,896	1,437	21,333
	state natural area	315		9	366	2,032	2,398
	state rec area	0		0	0	2	2
	state lakes	0	0	0	0	0	0
DENR - COASTAL MNGMT.	coastal reserves	18,790	378	9,735	28,903	58	28,961
	public beach/access	0	0	0	0	0	0
	submerged lands	0	0	0	0	0	0
DoA&CS - PLANT INDUSTRY	state nature preserve	3,898		3,074	6,972	2,039	9,011
	other lands						-
DCR - HISTORIC SITES	state historic sites	0	0	477	477	66	543
STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM	university property						
SUBTOTALS		67,144	23,656	23,714	114,514	19,148	133,662
Local Governments							
CITY AND COUNTY GOVERNMENTS	narka araanuaya watarahada						
(**)	parks, greenways, watersheds, etc.	9,994	5,413	817	16,224	1,211	17,435
( )	Cito.	0,004	3,413	017	10,224	1,211	17,400
SUBTOTALS		9,994	5,413	817	16,224	1,211	17,435
		-,	0,410	-	10,224	,	,
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Federal Agency							
US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE	national wildlife refuge	1,142	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	1,363	6,761	3,489	10,250
USDA FOREST SERVICE(***)	national forests	2,512	1,557	976	5,045	1,398	6,443
USDA-NRCS WETLAND RESERVE PROGRAM	wetlands reserve	3,149	1,894	0	5,043	4,487	9,530
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE	national park	209		201	6,675		6,675
TATIONAL FART GERVIOL	Hational park	200	0,203	201	0,073	•	0,013
SUBTOTALS		7,012	13,972	2,540	23,524	9,374	32,898
		1,012			20,324	2,27	32,333
Land Land Tweete							
Local Land Trusts							
NC LAND TRUSTS (****)	protected lands	22,738	10,500	14,419	47,657	16,495	64,152
SUBTOTALS		22,738	10,500	14,419	47,657	16,495	64,152
Other Conservation							
Groups							
THE NATURE CONSERVANCY(*****)	nature preserves	4,606		3,913	18,402	2,296	20,698
AUDUBON SOCIETY	nature preserves	0					0
AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST	farmland	0		0	_	0	0
PRESERVATION NC	historic preservation	577		39	636		636
NC COASTAL FEDERATION	nature preserves	2,767	0	2,168	4,935	288	5,223
DUCKS UNLIMITED	waterfowl habitat	0	403	1,944	2,347	3,291	5,638
CLIDTOTALO		7.050	40.000	0.004		5.075	20.425
SUBTOTALS		7,950	10,306	8,064	26,320	5,875	32,195
TOTALS		114,838	63,847	49,554	228,239	52,103	280,342
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<sup>\*</sup>Formerly Wetlands Restoration Program. EEP closed on 4,274 acres in 2003; 3,339 of those acres are held by other state agencies or land trusts.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Local governments include LWCF projects closed, PARTF projects funded, CWMTF local projects closed, and counties that responded to information requests.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>National Forests in North Carolina reports on fiscal year.

<sup>\*\*\*\*25</sup> local land trusts that regularly partner with the Conservation Trust for North Carolina. Local land trusts also conveyed 888 acres to local, state, and federal government in 2003.

<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>The Nature Conservancy closed on 16,522 acres in 2003. TNC transferred 14,266 of those acres to the State of North Carolina.